

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
OPENING STATEMENT FOR NOAA MARK-UP
May 17, 2005

I want to welcome everyone here today for this mark-up of bills concerning the heavens and the earth – and to the agencies that explore them, NOAA and NASA.

The main bill before us today is the NOAA Organic Act, introduced by Dr. Ehlers, which we had initially planned to mark up last week. This bill will give NOAA a firm legislative grounding, something that was called for by the Ocean Commission among others. The Administration has also called for an Organic Act for NOAA.

But our bill will do more than merely found NOAA in law. It will raise the profile of science at NOAA and improve its management. The bill also will greatly improve oversight of the agency by ensuring that Congress – and the public – get the information needed to evaluate NOAA's organizational structure, facilities plans, budgeting and satellite programs. This is a solid bill that will strengthen the agency.

And now we look forward to working with the Resources Committee, which shares jurisdiction over portions of NOAA, to get this bill to the floor.

Also related to NOAA, we will take up Congressman Rohrabacher's bill to create a scholarship for service program at NOAA, as we have at NASA and the Department of Energy. Service scholarships are a great way to entice students into science, math and engineering while also helping the federal government develop the workforce it will need. These scholarships have been championed tirelessly by Congressman Rohrabacher, and I congratulate him for that.

We are running the scholarship program through as a separate bill because specific program authorizations generally are not part of agency organic acts.

We will also take up two bills related to space today. These were last minute additions to today's roster, which is something we have generally avoided on this Committee. But this seemed like an opportune time to move these bills, and we can continue to work on them through manager's amendments on the floor.

Mr. Udall's bill, which the Committee also passed last Congress, concerns remote sensing. Mr. Udall will offer an amendment that will take care of concerns raised by companies in the remote sensing data business – concerns that have stymied progress on this bill in the past. I know that Mr. Bonner and I and perhaps some others have some further ideas for "perfecting" the bill, and we will work on those as the bill moves forward.

Mr. Rohrabacher's bill focuses on Near Earth Objects, a subject that has long concerned him and that has gotten quite a bit of press lately. Congressman Rohrabacher has helped us all understand that asteroids may present a real threat to Earth and that we need to pay greater attention to them.

All of these bills will improve our lives through increasing our understanding of the Earth, how it works and what may threaten it. As usual, these bills represent a bipartisan effort. I look forward to their passage.

Mr. Gordon.